

Milestones in Spiritual Life - 1

–Swami Samarpanananda

The need for milestones

Every spiritual aspirant is like a lonely traveller on the unknown path of the journey within -- a journey that makes him give up old associations, takes him through new vistas, allows him to leave behind milestones and finally gives him the experience of the Reality. But the process extracts its price. Old association, guidance, support, care and protection found in the external world are lost during this journey, and at times the aspirant gets the feeling of being directionless in the uncharted expanse of spiritual vastness.

This brings in the need for a systematic work on milestones in spiritual life, by referring to which any spiritual practitioner can make out where he stands in the journey within.

Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive work on this subject. Words of masters focus mostly on *sadhana*, with scanty references to its milestones. Also, different religions and various spiritual paths have different modes of *sadhana*, and hence it is difficult to have a universal yardstick of spiritual progress. However, since Sri Ramakrishna practised various religions and religious paths, his words and experiences can be used to create a model for milestones in spiritual life.

This work aims at finding the parameters of spiritual growth. Although it is not possible to objectify spiritual growth fully, this work gives a definite idea of one's state of spiritual progress.

Milestones in Nutshell

Talking of stages of spiritual growth, Sri Ramakrishna said:

'There are two indications of such knowledge. First, longing, that is to say, love for God. You may indulge in reasoning or discussion, but if you feel no longing or love, it is all futile. Second, the awakening of the Kundalini. As long as the Kundalini remains asleep, you have not attained knowledge of God. (*Gospel*, p. 610-11).

'The first stage is that of the beginner. He studies and hears. Second is the stage of the struggling aspirant. He prays to God, meditates on him, and sings his name and glories. The third stage is that of the perfect soul. He has seen God, realized him directly and immediately in his inner consciousness. (p.344) ... The inner consciousness must be awakened through the grace of God. Through this awakening a man goes into samadhi. He often forgets that he has a body. He gets rid of his attachment to "women and gold" and does not enjoy any talk unless it is about God. Worldly talk gives him pain. Through the awakening of the inner consciousness one realizes the all-pervading consciousness (p.734).'

Madhusudan Saraswati details the process of spiritual growth in his *Gudhartha Dipika* on *Bhagavad-Gita* as

'Steadfastness in selfless works comes first; from that follows purification of the mind; thereafter the renunciation of all actions, led by control of sense organs etc.; then comes steadfastness in devotion to the Lord, together with *vichara* on the Upanisadic sentences. From that comes steadfastness in the Knowledge of Reality; and the result of that is

jivanmukti, which comes through the cessation of nescience consisting of the three *gunas* and continues up to the end of the experience of the *prarabdha karma*. At the end of that comes *videha-mukti*. And during the state of *jivanmukti* one acquires supreme detachment through adherence to the highest human Goal; and the virtuous disposition, called divine wealth (*daiva-sampat*)....(introduction to chapter 3).'

William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (p. 247) sums up the final outcome of spirituality in an objective way as:

"The characteristics of the affective experience which, to avoid ambiguity, should, I think, be called the state of assurance rather than the faith-state, can be easily enumerated, though it is probably difficult to realize their intensity...The central one is the loss of all the worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, the willingness to be, even though the outer conditions should remain the same. ... The second feature is the sense of perceiving truths not known before. The mysteries of life become lucid..... but unutterable in words....The third peculiarity of the assurance state is the objective change, which the world often appears to undergo. "An appearance of newness beautifies every object..."

A : Changes in one's relation to the world

The first step in the spiritual journey is figuratively seen as coming out from the maze of worldliness and taking up the path to freedom.

A person identifies himself with the world through his perception of himself and of the world around him. When he begins his spiritual journey, his convictions undergo a change. This results in a major shift in his attitude and identification with the world. The stages of these changes are:

Worldly fetters start loosening: A non-spiritual person's intense identification with the world makes him feel one with it. Parents, spouse, siblings, relatives, friends and colleagues create a sense of belonging, duty and responsibility. In turn, all these forces compel a person to move in the rut of the world. But a true seeker finds things becoming favourable for him to get out of the rut. The idea of marriage, children etc. become repulsive to him, and even if he gets married due to unexpected turn of events, he remains dispassionate about relationship, and his spouse becomes a companion in the spiritual journey. The financial worries of true seekers are taken care of by well wishers, their desire for comforts gets diluted, and the trifling matters of the world stop being a bother for him. That is how such persons find themselves free of worldly responsibilities.

World appears as an abyss: For a spiritual seeker, what he had earlier considered to be a haven, now appears like a dark abyss, and, those whom he considered to be the mainstay of life, now appear as deadly enemies (like "venomous snakes", as Sri Ramakrishna puts it). Even places of fun and merriment appear like deadly traps, and old associations appear like poison.

Various spiritual teachers have described this state of a beginner's mind differently. One may feel as if the world is on fire, or his body and head is on fire. Some get a sense of oppressive stifling, feeling of asphyxia, or a sense of getting drowned in the ocean of the world. Sri Ramakrishna describes this state of mind with the story of the fledgling mythical bird *Homa*. The mother lays her egg very high in the skies and the egg is hatched while still falling. As the fledgling emerges and finds itself plummeting to the earth, it gets terrified of being smashed and it immediately shoots skyward to reach its mother and safety.

An example of this feeling is found in Swami Vivekananda's life:

Narendra: I went to my study at my grandmother's. As I tried to read I was seized with a great fear, as if studying were a terrible thing. My heart struggled within me. I burst into tears: I never wept so bitterly in my life. I left my books and ran away. I ran along the streets. My shoes slipped from my feet—I didn't know where. I ran past a haystack and got hay all over me. I kept on running along the road to Cossipore. (*Gospel*–936)

Such concrete feeling of terror and apprehension regarding the world comes to most spiritual seekers. Once a seeker experiences this, the charming music of worldliness is silenced forever for him.

World looks like an alien land: There might be cases when an aspirant may have to live in the world to fulfil some obligation. Such aspirants perform all duties lovingly, interact with people, but they also know that they are alone in the world. They feel like persons who have come to a foreign land for a while, and who must return to their real home at the earliest.

When such a seeker is intoxicated with divine love, the sense of belonging to the world vanishes for him, and thus all his bonds with others break down. The sense of belonging is now replaced by a sense of universal compassion.

Renouncing the world is a mark of spiritual progress: External renunciation is one of the formal marks of that great inner renunciation that takes one to God. Most religious leaders, including Buddha and Christ had renounced the world.

Family life is like a whirlpool in which people get sucked. The lisping of children and the sweet words of the beloved spouse are like a soothing murmur masking the danger of the whirlpool. Like a silkworm trapped in its cocoon, it becomes impossible for a person to cut through the relationships that he has built over the years.

Sri Ramakrishna says that 'He who has renounced the world has already made great progress' (*Gospel*, p.372). Anyone who has left his home in the name of God is surely an advanced soul, even if he may not be doing a lot of spiritual practices. He is like a free person who can achieve anything, but a person tied to the world is fettered. The latter can walk, but quite often he stumbles.

Love for solitude grows: Renunciation of the world, externally or mentally is always followed by a desire to live in solitude and to follow one's path intensely.

However, sometimes it is seen that some aspirants give up their old association to grow spiritually, but end up acquiring new relationships with strangers. This inexorably ties

them down. But a person growing in spiritual life discards old connections and interacts very little with strangers, i.e., he loves staying indrawn both externally and internally.

Sense pleasures grow Insipid: A persons may enjoy spiritual moods, spiritual talks, renunciation, etc. now and then, but his tendency is to return to worldly enjoyments. They may be compared to the housefly that sits on flowers and also on garbage. But a genuine spiritual person is like a honeybee that sips only the nectar from flowers. Spiritually advanced persons renounce worldly pleasures to the extent that they do not even keep objects of temptations around them, knowing that these objects may lead to their downfall. With further growth an aspirant feels a stabbing pain if he has to hear worldly talks.

A person who has tasted divine joy does not care to lead a worldly life. For such persons all desires for wife and children cease. To one who thinks of God's beauty, the beauty of even celestial nymphs appear ugly and hideous.

To give an example from Swamiji's life: " Of Swamiji's many tours through the Exposition, only one brief story has come down to us.... One day when he was walking through the Exposition grounds, he saw a young woman whose face was arrestingly beautiful. He turned to look at her in admiration, but even as he did so, her exquisite features became in his eyes metamorphosed into those of a grimacing monkey, as repulsive as they had been attractive. The "celestial panorama on earth" could hold no temptations for Swamiji; his eyes, the perfect servants of his renunciation, saw through beauty to the bone. (*New Discoveries* Vol 6.326).

This incident explains how enlightened minds work.

The intimacy with animate and inanimate objects is the chief source of joy and sustenance for a common man, whereas this intimacy is the biggest obstacle for a spiritual aspirant. This sudden loss of the source of joy can be painful and frightening for an ordinary aspirant, and this is the main reason why most people do not go for a spiritual life. What people do not realise is that once the initial turbulence of the senses passes off, it becomes easy to bear with them.

This fact has been beautifully described in Homer's famous Greek classic *Odyssey*, in which there is the story about the Island of the Sirens. The residents of the Island were part women and part bird, but had extremely alluring voices. Their songs enchanted the sailors of the passing ships. Charmed by the singing, sailors would veer their ships towards the Island, flounder and capsize on the disastrous rocks that ringed it. The survivors if any were made captives.

Odysseus, a great warrior of many exploits that included the destruction of Troy, had to sail past the Island of the Sirens. He was forewarned about the danger and was advised to plug the ears of all his sailors with bees-wax so that no sound could enter their ears. If he wanted to hear the singing, he had to get bound hands and feet to the mast and make his crew swear not to release him under any condition. This was done. When the ship neared the island, the sailors did not react to the music, but Odysseus became so enamoured by the music that he screamed to be untied, struggled against the bonds and threatened the sailors with dire consequences if they did not obey his commands.

In the same epic there is the description of Jason and his ship, *Argo*. Jason and his comrades were returning with the Golden Fleece when they had to face the soul wrenching music of the Sirens. Jason countered the soft music of the Sirens with even more sublime strains of Orpheus's lyre.

The similarity of these stories with the spiritual journey of a person is striking.

In the early phases of *sadhana*, an aspirant may get agonised by his senses. In the second stage he may become like the sailors who had their ears plugged with bees-wax. But when spiritual growth becomes firm, the necessity to flee from the world and its objects vanishes. Now the attraction of God's own music overshadows the din created by the worldly objects.

There are occasions when a person leading a worldly life, surrounded by objects of enjoyment but satiated to a great extent may start believing that he is established in renunciation. This is not true. There is a story in the *Mahabharata*, about the ascetic sage Mudgala and his family consisting of his wife and son. They used to eat only once a fortnight. The collection of alms was regulated in such a way that there were no leftovers after their fortnightly meal. To test the power of this sage, another sage, Durvasa, famous for his anger, decided to visit Mudgala on the day he ate and demanded to be fed. Mudgala was overjoyed to have such a great sage as guest and offered him the food that was prepared. Durvasa ate up everything and left, only to return the next fortnight. This time also he did the same thing and continued to repeat his test four more times. So, for three months the family lived without eating, but the sage Mudgala remained unperturbed. Finally the sage Durvasa blessed Mudgala saying that 'It is impossible even for sages to continue with the spiritual practices without food. Hunger arouses the worst of passions in everyone's minds. You are truly great to have remained emotionally unmoved even though your food was taken away for such a long time.'

Forced hunger arouses the worst of emotions in our minds. Those who live in the world but do not enjoy its pleasures due to satiation, are not really great. Only when the body and mind is not perturbed even when away from enjoyments, that one can be considered great. Swami Vivekananda came down heavily with scorn on 'the modern day Janaka-s', who while living in the world thought themselves to be great. He said, "who was a greater renouncer than he (Janaka)? But in modern times we all want to be called Janakas! They are all Janakas (lit fathers) of children—unclad, ill fed, miserable children. The word Janaka can be applied to them in that sense only; they have none of the shining, godlike thoughts as the old Janaka had" (*Complete Works*, 3. 343).

We feel less angry when we are actually insulted than when we remember it afterwards, and we feel more ashamed remembering our deeds than when we were actually committing them. Similarly, we feel stronger cravings when we are away from the desired objects and cogitate over them. Concrete objects always have a milder hold on us when they are physically present than when they come to us as ideas. It is usual for aspirants to fall prey to this tendency of mind even when they are fairly advanced.

Indifference to wealth, health, and fame: With spiritual growth, the desire for worldly props and support go away. A true devotee does not care for wealth, health, comforts, money, name and fame. Even if they have to earn money for some purpose, they keep their needs to a bare minimum, and never look beyond the need of simple necessities. Their attention to the body extends only as far as appeasing their hunger by simple means.

Such persons are inwardly satisfied, and they spend what they earn without ever crossing the limit.

Above all, they become indifferent to respect and recognition and censure. Knowing themselves to be the Lord's servant and beloved, they do not get agitated with the thought of pleasing or displeasing someone. Flattery and lies drop away from their character. Even their indifference towards the society's high and mighty is deep. Such seekers care only for the devotees of God, even if they be paupers.

This briefly sketches the relationship between a spiritually evolving person and the world. Changes that come over such persons are not the product of thinking or rationalising, but is a spontaneous process. Holding on to the high ideals is not a struggle for them; rather making a compromise to the ideal is a struggle.

B: Effect on the body and senses

Each individual's nature and personality is like an open book that can be read easily provided we know how to do it. Our visage figure and carriage get modelled on the state of our mind. How we sit, how we talk, how we walk, how we sleep, how we behave and other such acts show how we think and what we are. Our vices, virtues, intelligence, stupidity, concealed habits, tendencies, and above all the spiritual make-up seem to be proclaiming about themselves through our limbs and faces.

Thoughts affect the the neural circuitry which in turn affects the structure of the body. When one indulges in a particular kind of thought for a long time, the body undergoes related changes permanently. In turn, this change now makes it easy for the mind to fulfil the thoughts which need the help of the body. Thus the thoughts of a sprinter aiming at an Olympic gold will changes his brain, which in turn will shape his body accordingly to convert the dream into reality. Similarly, persons with violent thoughts find harsh lines appearing on their face, whereas the face of a poet looks soft.

When holy thoughts permeate the mind, the brain and the body undergoes structural changes. The face too changes accordingly.. Spiritual moulds being different, the bodily changes, and the bodily marks are different. The overall appearance of an aspirant speaks unmistakably of the mould in which he is trying to cast himself. The philosophical understanding of the mould, the convictions, and the extent of the progress made are clearly visible to a discerning eye. Great masters have been known to possess the power to assess the correct spiritual nature of a person and also set them on the right path, if they had chosen a wrong one.

For example, during Sri Ramakrishna's time the Brahmo movement was at its peak. Inspired by Keshub Chandra Sen, people of Kolkata had taken to the philosophy of the movement which criticised idol-worship and extolled the path of knowledge. There was a kind of glamour in proclaiming oneself a *jnani*, follower of the path of knowledge. But, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'It will not do merely to repeat, "I am He, I am He"'. There are certain signs of a *jnani*. Narendra has big protruding eyes. (Pointing to a devotee) He also has good eyes and forehead (P.249). ... You see, I can recognise a *paramhansa* by his neck and forehead (p. 881).'

On the other hand talking of non-spiritual persons, he used to say,' Short stature and a body with dents here and there are not good traits. People with such traits take a long time to acquire spiritual knowledge (p.766).... Bony people, the hollow-eyed, the cross-eyed --- people with physical traits like those cannot easily acquire faith (p.234).'

The major changes that come over the spiritual travellers are:

Physical changes in the body

Spiritual thought-currents seem to burn away the heaviness from the body of an aspirant. A person of devotion has a soft body and the joints of his arms and legs are not thick-set, i.e., these parts can be turned round easily. Even if the body is thin, the joints do not seem angular. The weight of the forearm of a person with pure mind is lighter than those of a common man. Even if a saint is bulky, or muscular, there is a kind of softness in his body. The raw strength and the brutality goes away from the limbs of such persons.

It is believed that at the time of answering calls of nature, the yogis have their stream of urine deflecting to the right and that their faeces do not give out foul smell. Persons with divine tendencies do not have raised nipples. It is difficult to say if these characteristics extend to the aspirants of other paths or not.

A person with eyes like the petals of a lotus has good thoughts in him. The eyes of a yogi have an upward look and are reddish, and a godly person has longish eyes which reach very near the ears.

Certain bodily deformities, like blindness do not disappear with sadhana. The great sage Ashtavakra continued to have deformed limbs. The great Hindi mystic poet, Surdas remained blind throughout his life. However, other traits like softness are sure to appear even in the physically challenged.

Changes in voice and health: One of the first effects of spiritual practice is perceived in the change of expression of one's face. Spirituality brings calmness which is reflected in the face. Harsh lines disappear which makes it universally appealing.

Next comes beautiful voice. The defects of the voice get smoothened. Instead of rough, croaky or shrill voice one gets a sweet, soothing, melodious and impressive voice.

The nervous excitement, so common to a worldly person gets toned down which results in good health. This does not mean that they become robust or like a wrestler. What this implies is that a successful aspirant is never sickly. Disease and sickness come to them, but problems like psychosomatics do not touch them any more. A sense of general well-being prevails.

Spiritual growth brings joy in the eyes and the face: People get sustained by the joy they get. A child deprived of his mother loses his health despite best nutrition provided to him, whereas a poor kid acquires robust health with ordinary food and a loving mother. An adult sustains himself with love, wealth, family, status etc. When such source of joy dries up, a person becomes disoriented and listless.

A person given to spiritual life loses all worldly connections, aspirations and hope. His only source of joy now is God. As one starts growing in spirituality, his sense of joy also increases; his eyes and face starts beaming with a kind of inner joy. The more intense the love for the ideal, the more is the manifestation of the joy.

Compared to these, the superficially religious have dry eyes and dry face.

Yogis have an aimless look : Brain studies have shown that when the mind is focussed on any one subject, the input from other sources become dim. More the concentration, less the attention on other things. Thus, a person engrossed in reading a book, or watching an interesting programme does not become aware of a nearby sound.

Something like this happens when an aspirant's absorption in God becomes deep and continuous. An advanced aspirant gets too absorbed in higher thoughts to pay attention to the world. The visual cortex which is quite active in a common man, loses its prominence in the brain of such an aspirant. The tendency to look from the corner of the eye, or to map the surrounding with a sweeping glance go away. This gives him an aimless look with eyes wide open. They seem to be looking at something distant. Sri Ramakrishna compared this look with the eyes of the mother bird hatching her eggs.

Flushed chest and bright body: With the increase in devotion and purity, the body takes up a new kind of brightness. Even an aspirant with dark complexion gets a new kind of sheen in his skin. The body parts seem aglow. In rare cases the body may appear to be radiating light. That is why many saints are painted with a halo around their head.

The face becomes attractive and remains beaming with brightness even during illness. The chest becomes flushed during worship or meditation. The redness of limbs increase.

Eyes become tear-brimmed: Chanting, singing and dancing in the name of God make people emotional. It has been seen that during community singing and dancing people shed copious tears to release their emotions. This kind of sadhana has been popular since ages, and continues to be so till date. The release caused by such emotional outbursts gives one a strong sense of well-being. So, people love to duplicate it.

Compared to these, persons following the path of devotion become overwhelmed by just thinking or hearing the name of God. This happens even during silent meditation in seclusion. Eyes get filled with tears which flow from their corners.

There is a story of a scholar who regularly used to read the *Gita* in an open place. Another man who did not seem educated, used to sit at a distance listening to the recital and weep. When asked if he understood what was being read out, he declined and explained that he only saw Arjuna's chariot before him, in front of which sat and conversed Lord Krishna and Arjuna. This made his eyes swim in tears.

The overflow of this kind of devotion always results in tears. In addition to this, the sheer delight born of genuine devotion also brings horripilations in the body and makes the aspirant's hair on the body stand on end. This is not to be confused with goose bumps. In extreme cases of absorption the hair may appear as straight and firm as the quills of a hedgehog.

Becomes free of body-consciousness: We are reminded of an incident when Girish Chandra Ghosh and Narendra nath Dutta, the future Swami Vivekananda, were meditating under a tree at night. Girish was not able to meditate because of the mosquitoes. He got up from his seat and saw that Narendra's body was covered with mosquitoes like a thick blanket, but he was not even aware of it.

A man cannot get rid of body-consciousness as long as he is attached to worldly things. His brain stays active with too many things which keeps the various areas of the brain connected with different senses activated. This increases body-consciousness.

As one becomes less and less attached to worldly things, he becomes less and less aware of external objects. This decreases body-consciousness. Through intense spiritual discipline one comes out completely of this consciousness, though for most people a complete freedom from body-consciousness is something impossible.

C. Changes in activities

When we go through the scriptures of old religions we find a great emphasis laid upon morality and charity as the ultimate way of life to attain the highest. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam, and the ancient Vedic religions are very good examples of this outlook. Zoroastrianism puts a lot of emphasis on good thoughts, good words, and good deeds whereas Islam emphasises on charity. The Vedas extolled charitable sacrifices like *Ishta* and *Purta*. But the reformatory religions like Vedanta, Christianity and Buddhism lay more stress on the inner spiritual growth.

True spirituality considers every physical or mental act an impediment in inner growth. At best they are accepted as purificatory in nature. Such acts lose their importance once the mind is cleansed of past impurities. Action implies expression of inner desires through the medium of the body, whereas spirituality demands a complete burning down of all desires. Mistaken priority waylays potential saints into giving solace to the deserving. The glamour associated with such acts drown these aspirants in the mire of worldliness

It is, however, neither possible nor advisable to give up every kind of action in the beginning of spiritual journey itself. Till one completes his quota of enjoyment, he has to keep working. In the second stage, the aspirant has to hold on to activities like worship, pilgrimage, charity etc. In the final stage, when one has attained perfection, every kind of duty -- personal, social, religious drop away.

The steps are:

The quota of work must be exhausted: Once a person becomes conscious of his desire to be spiritual, he tries to finish his remaining duties quickly. This also works at subconscious level. The accumulated desire to enjoy by a person tends to get expressed at a fast pace and suddenly one seems to be doing a lot of activities. So, at the beginning of religious life a man seems to be making much ado about work, but this sudden spurt is only the sign of coming peace.

Desire to help others come in initial stage: Once the necessary preparation for spiritual life is complete, mind becomes less self-centred. Activities become more selfless. Charitable acts, philanthropic activities increase. Desire to serve others becomes the prime motive of life. Self-sacrifice and self-effacement gain importance. Every motivation to suffer for others is a sign of some kind of spiritual development. This continues till one realises that God alone is the Highest Good.

Inclination to perform worldly duties reduces : The need and desire to do work continues only till one thinks himself to be the body. The worldly duties are outcome of this feeling only. That is why people talk about leading a religious life in the world.

Once the body-consciousness decreases by means of spiritual practices, aspirants become free of the sense of duty towards others. They do not become indifferent to the woes of people around them, but the bondage born of such feelings goes away. As their spiritual joy becomes deeper, they simply cannot perform their worldly duties. Sri Ramakrishna gives the example of the pregnant woman in the advanced stage whose duties get reduced by her in-laws.

What is interesting about this point is that the inclination to do work goes away, and

also the duties seem to get reduced in a mysterious way.

Desire for Philanthropic activities also goes away: Liberation means freedom from both good and bad. Some persons must perform selfless work a long time before they can practise dispassion and direct their minds to the spiritual ideal. With the help of selfless activities, one outgrows selfishness, but when the time for intense sadhana comes one spontaneously gives up the desire to serve others. If one truly believes that God dwells inside us, one feels like giving up all activities and focussing only on God-realisation.

Pilgrimage becomes unimportant: In the early stage of conversion one feels like going to various places of pilgrimage associated with one's path of sadhana. This is partly to reinforce one's faith and partly as a cleansing rite. It is not unusual to meet devotees who make it a practice to visit certain places associated with their faith on a regular basis. This way they feel a sense of belonging to their faith and also feel that they have discharged their religious duties. For a devotee surrounded with worldly duties, this is indeed very important. But, this is not applicable to persons given wholly to God.

With the development of love for God's name, the urge to visit places goes away. The restlessness born of longing for vision of God makes the desire for pilgrimage look trivial.

External purity becomes unimportant: Purity, both external and internal, plays an important role in spiritual life. No impure person can aspire to be spiritual. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* (2.40) states that 'by getting established in cleanliness one develops distaste for his own body and dislike for contact with other's body.'

In the early stages of growth and in ritualistic worship, external purity plays an important role. However, too much attention to external cleanliness is a sign of obsessive-compulsive disorder, a mental disease. The mind that is to be dedicated to God-realisation must not be allowed to focus on non-essentials. The tendency to be over-fastidious about cleanliness drops away with spiritual growth. It has been seen that a person established in the knowledge of Brahman goes beyond cleanliness and uncleanness.

Goes beyond dharma, adharma : The code of conduct as defined by a particular spiritual mould is known as *dharma*, or virtue. Prohibitory acts are *adharma*. In the early stages of growth one holds on tenaciously to the acts that are considered holy, virtuous and meritorious. At that time there is a constant struggle to stay away from sinful activities, as defined by the particular mould. *Gita* advises the spiritual aspirants to strictly follow the dictates of the scriptures in the matters of doing and not doing, *Tasmat Shastram pramanam te Karya akarya vyavasthitau*. Introspection leads an aspirant to pinpoint his sinful tendencies. Then the struggle is to come out of them and consolidate the noble traits. This requires reasoning and scriptural reference.

Slowly, with the awakening of spiritual consciousness, aspirants do not have to reason much to shun evil. They get established in what is essential and outgrow those that are non-essential. They are so full of love of God that whatever action they undertake is a good action. They are fully aware that they are not the doers of their actions, but mere servants of God. In addition, their conduct becomes the role model for the society.

Rituals and formal worship become secondary and finally drop away:

The mystic experiences of the pathfinders give birth to philosophy, mythology, and

rituals. It is not possible for ordinary persons to have a glimpse in the nature of Reality, nor hold on to the sublime philosophy of their religion. They need something concrete, something which would be within their reach. This makes them attracted towards mythology, which is philosophy clothed in fancy dress, and rituals, which is philosophy made concrete. Either of these paths is good enough to take a person towards the realisation without taking him to the rigours of philosophy.

Spiritual practices comprise of two stages: Ritual and non-formal. The ritual worship is preparatory in nature, aimed at cleansing one's mind and acquiring divine love. In this one makes elaborate plans of doing a certain number of *japa*, so much of meditation, so much of pilgrimage etc. The non-formal devotion is characterised by an intense longing of a devotee for the ideal. One forgets all kinds of formality in this stage, and is filled with a kind of constant divine frenzy.

An atheist or a lazy aspirant also shuns rituals. But, it is not difficult to differentiate between a shirker and a person who has outgrown the need of rituals.

Sri Ramakrishna compared the rituals to blossom of a plant, and love of God as its fruit. One leads to the other, but drops away after doing its duty. He said, 'At the beginning of spiritual life the devotees should observe such rites as pilgrimage, putting a string of beads around his neck and so forth. But outward ceremonies gradually drop off as he attains the goal, the vision of God. (p.305)...When a man sheds tears at the name of Hari, Kali, or Rama, then he has no further need of the *sandhya* (a ritual practised extensively by Hindus) and other rites. All actions drop away of themselves. The fruit of action does not touch him. (p. 251)'

The goal of all rituals, ceremonial worship, prayer, meditation etc. is to make one's mind mature with the love of God. Once it is attained, there is no further need for such things. Then meditation and contemplation become a constant habit of the mind and the rigours of practise gives way to spontaneity. When one starts shedding tears on hearing the name of God, and his hair stand on end, then one should know that he need not perform external worship any more. With the realisation of the ideal, all external and internal rituals drop away forever.

Goes beyond Scriptures

Every scripture has two roles: Prescribing the rituals, and, pointing the Reality from a distance, as is done in poetry. No poet can ever portray the reality the way it is; one must have a personal experience to enjoy and appreciate a poem. Same with spiritual attainments. They are entirely subjective. The scriptures can only point at the Reality, without actually describing it fully. It is just not possible. That is why the ancient sages of India were called *Kavi*, meaning the poet. For the same reason, Sri Ramakrishna talks of his experiences transcending the Vedas and Vedanta. There can be only a faint semblance of the actual with the described.

In Hinduism, the scriptures and the sages talk of transcending their most venerated scriptures, the Vedas in the matters of injunctions, prohibitions and also in spiritual experiences. Unlike Hinduism, other religions prescribe the aspirants to stay bound within their respective scriptures by taking vows to abide by them. But, Hinduism encourages the transcendence by giving up. This is the highest ideal of *sannyasa* (called differently as *Nirveda*, *Trigunatita* etc.), which can be attained by anyone even without taking the formal vows. This happens only when one is in a state of divine intoxication. Shabari, the great devotee of Sri Rama offered him half-eaten berries in the state of divine joy. She had gone beyond all kinds of external forms. Similarly there are devotees, who are beyond the three *gunas* (an essential concept to explain the world by the Samkhya philosophers and later

adopted by the Vedantins). Their worship consists in only chanting God's name.

As is clear from the foregoing discussions, a person not engaging himself in rituals is an advanced soul only if his body and mind responds unconditionally towards God at the slightest suggestion.

Milestones in Spiritual Life - 2

D. Changes in the personality (outgrowing the negative)

The high-rise of spirituality grows on the bulldozed slums of the world-bound personality. Before the growth of the new and coveted, the old one has to die. Something similar happens in the case of spiritually growing; their old tendencies give way to new ones, traits that do not fit in the mould are shed, the gaps are filled up.

1. Initial outburst of foul and filthy: (To Girish) 'You utter many abusive and vulgar words; but that doesn't matter. It is better for these things to come out. There are some people who fall ill on account of blood poisoning; the more the poisoned blood finds an outlet, the better it is for them. At the time when the upadhi of a man is being destroyed, it makes a loud noise, as it were. Wood crackles when it burns; there is no more noise when the burning is over.' (p.741)

2. Wicked, sinful tendencies drop: 'When a man merges himself in God, he can no longer retain wicked or sinful tendencies...he keeps only the "Knowledge ego", the "devotee ego" the "servant ego", and the "good ego". His "wicked ego" disappears.' (p.252)

3. Lust, passion etc. disappear: Only after much meditation and japa could I get rid of these ("women and gold") desires.... Is it an easy matter to get rid of lust?(p. 739).... As the tiger devours other animals, so does the "tiger of zeal for the Lord" eat up lust, anger and the other passions. Once this zeal grows in the heart, lust and the other passions disappear.'(p. 206)

4. Body, mind, ego get shaken up: '(To Keshab) Why is it that you are ill? There is a reason for it. Many spiritual feelings have passed through your body; therefore it has fallen ill. At the time an emotion is aroused, one understands very little about it. The blow that it delivers to the body is felt only after a long while.... When a house is on fire, at first a few things inside burn. Then comes the great commotion. Just so, the fire of knowledge at first destroys such enemies of spiritual life as passion, anger, and so forth. Then comes the turn of ego. And lastly a violent commotion is seen in the physical frame.' (p.322)

5. Waywardness of senses and mind go away: 'That (the practise of discrimination to attain self-control) is also a path. It is called the path of *vichara*, reasoning. But the inner organs (mind-stuff, mind, intelligence and ego) are brought under control naturally through the path of devotion as well. It is rather easily accomplished that way.' (p. 203)

6. Power to discriminate and give up increases: 'Most people don't feel any longing for God unless they have once passed through the experience of wealth, name, fame, creature comforts, and the like.... Dispassion is not possible unless there is satiety through enjoyment

(p.216).... The soul become restless for God when one is through with the enjoyment of worldly things.' (p. 272)

'One succeeds if one develops a strong spirit of renunciation. (P. 246)

'Discrimination is the reasoning by which one knows that God alone is real and all else is unreal. Real means eternal, and unreal means impermanent. He who has acquired discrimination knows that God is the only Substance and all else is non-existent. With the awakening of this spirit of discrimination a man wants to know God.' (p. 327)

7. Eight fetters drop: A man stays grounded to worldliness through six cardinal enemies (lust, anger, greed, delusion, arrogance, jealousy) and eight fetters (sense of shame, hatred, fear, caste, lineage, good conduct, grief, and secretiveness). It is essential that they release us so that we may proceed on our journey within. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'One cannot be spiritual as long as one has shame, hatred or fear... (p. 186). These fetters fall off in a moment, by the grace of God.... All the knots of ignorance come undone in the twinkling of an eye, through the guru's grace.' (p. 298)

Only when the heart becomes pure, an aspirant becomes fit for divine love.

E. Changes in the personality (The positive growth)

Culture is a state of perfection of traits and trades whose echo and influence transcends time and space. A gentleman is one who has certain kind of culture related to character. Culture related to personality is always the down-flow of spiritual values among the masses. Every spiritual person is essentially a gentleman, not in the sense of show and polish but at the core of values as detailed below.

'He who has surrendered his body, mind, and innermost self to God is surely a holy man. He who has renounced "woman and gold" is surely a holy man.... The holy man constantly thinks of God and does not indulge in any talk except about spiritual things. Furthermore, he serves all beings, knowing that God resides in everybody's heart.' (p.327)

A general description of initial feelings born of growth in spiritual life is described in *The Way of a Pilgrim*: 'Sometimes my heart would feel as though it were bubbling with joy, such lightness, freedom and consolation were in it. Sometimes I felt a burning love for Jesus Christ and for all God's creatures. Sometimes my eyes brimmed over with tears of thankfulness to God.... Sometimes my understanding, which had been so stupid before, was given so much light that I could easily grasp and dwell upon matters of which up to now I had not been able even to think at all. Sometimes that sense of a warm gladness in my heart spread throughout my whole being... (p. 41)'

1. a. Becomes egoless, guileless, fearless etc. 'You cannot get rid of it (ego) until you have realized God. If you find a person free from ego, then know for certain that he has seen God.(p.451)

'One cannot realize God without being guileless and liberal minded.... One cannot be guileless and liberal-minded unless one is free from worldliness.... The Vedanta says that a man does not even desire to know God unless he has a pure mind. One cannot be guileless and liberal minded without much *tapasya* or unless it is one's last birth. (p. 581)

'In that state of God-intoxication I used to speak out my mind to all. I was no respecter of persons. Even to men of position I was not afraid to speak the truth.' (p.118)

In passing it may be noted that such kind of truthfulness comes spontaneously. The sting associated with the truth is blunted by the simplicity and absence of guile of a spiritual person. Sri Ramakrishna always advised his listeners not to use abrasive language in the name of being truthful.

b. Becomes prideless, peaceful, and serene: ' (To a devotee) There are two signs of knowledge: first, absence of pride, and second, a peaceful nature. (p. 819)

'The nearer you come to God, the more you will feel peace. Peace, peace, peace --- supreme peace! (p. 178)

'(Regarding a devotee who was criticised by Sri Ramakrishna) He is so much given to japa! How can words affect him?' (p.617)

'The first sign of knowledge is a peaceful nature, and the second is absence of egotism. (p. 493)

'Feeling serene and peaceful, they (kutichaks) settle down in one place ' (p. 128)

c. Becomes considerate: '(A good man) never troubles others. He doesn't harass people.... A man who has true devotion to God never makes a false step, never gives others trouble for nothing.' (p.281)

d. Harmony in words and actions develop : 'There is a big difference between a scholar and a holy man.... A scholar says one thing and does another. But it is quite a different matter with a sadhaka.' (p. 296)

e. Becomes soft and humble: '(Referring to Dr. Sarkar) If he ever tastes divine bliss, he will see everything, above and below, filled with it. Then he will not say that whatever he says is right and what others say is wrong. Then he will not utter sharp, strong, pointed words.' (p. 915)

f. Becomes Pure: Purity, impurity, bondage, freedom and all such things are of the mind. With growth one starts getting the mind more and more under control and follows the code of the chosen mould firmly making himself pure.

'If a man repeats the name of God, his body, mind, and everything becomes pure.' (p. 138)

h. Becomes compassionate: 'Compassion is the love for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality. If you see anywhere an instance of compassion, as in Vidyasagar, know that it is due to the grace of God.' (p. 161)

i Remains unshaken in ups and downs: 'However much a bhakta may experience physical joy and sorrow, he always has knowledge and the treasure of divine love. This treasure never leaves him. Take the Pandava brother for instance. Though they suffered so many calamities, they did not lose their God-consciousness even once.' (p. 276)

2. Becomes alert and dignified: 'Man should possess dignity and alertness. Only he whose spiritual consciousness is awakened possesses this dignity and alertness and can be called a man.' (p. 844)

'Maya is nothing but "women and gold". A man living in its midst gradually loses his spiritual alertness....' (p.131)

3. Outward show goes away: 'Sattvic bhakti is known to God alone. It makes no outward display. A man with such devotion loves privacy. Perhaps he meditates inside the mosquito net, where nobody sees him. When this kind of devotion is awakened, one hasn't long to wait for the vision of God. The appearance of the dawn in the east shows that the sun will rise before long.' (p.494. Also p. 306, 579)

4. Growth of strong grit and unwavering mind: 'Worldly people have no grit. If they succeed in an undertaking, it is all right, but if they don't succeed, it scarcely bothers them at all (p.208).... They are like flattened rice soaked in milk--- soft and mushy. No inner strength. (p. 92)

'There are two signs of knowledge (of God). First, an unshakable buddhi. No matter how many sorrows, afflictions, dangers, and obstacles one may be faced with, one's mind does not undergo any change. It is like the blacksmith's anvil, which receives constant blows from the hammer and still remains unshaken. And second, manliness --- very strong grit. If lust and anger injure a man, he must renounce them once for all. (p. 410)

'Unless the mind becomes steady there cannot be yoga. It is the wind of worldliness that always disturbs the mind.' (p. 113, also p. 248, 579)

5. Growth of attitude: Attitude is everything. In order to realise God one must have one of these attitudes towards God : *santa* (serene), *dasya* (servant), *sakhya* (friendship), *vatsalya* (affection), and *madhura* (love). Depending on the state of mind and the path, attitude may differ but it must be firm and steady.

'What you (Narendra) say (regarding taking any kind of food that comes to one) applies to a particular state of the aspirant's mind. No food can harm a jnani. According to the Gita, the jnani himself does not eat; his eating is an offering to the Kundalini. But that does not apply to a bhakta. The present state of my mind is such that I cannot eat any food unless it is first offered to God by a brahmin priest' (p.564).

Needless to add, failure to understand this particular aspect in spiritual journey has caused a lot of heartburn all around. The attitude referred here is not only about eating, but applies to all routine activities.

6. Conviction and conversation become God-centred 'Reasoning and discrimination vanish after the attainment of God and communion with him in samadhi. How long does a man reason and discriminate? As long as he is conscious of the manifold, as long as he is aware of the universe, of embodied beings, of "I" and "You". He becomes silent when he is truly aware of Unity. (p. 177, also 735,852,844)

'In some people spiritual consciousness has already been awakened; but they have special marks. They do not enjoy hearing or talking about anything but God.(p.205)

'A jnani loves to talk only about God. He feels pained if one talks about worldly things. But a worldly man... always comes back to worldly topics.' (p.659, also 199, 660)

7. Seeks holy company: 'If a man loves God, he will himself seek the company of holy men now and then. I give the illustration of the hemp-Smoker. One hemp-smoker loves the company of another hemp-smoker. ' (p. 883)

'When the time comes for setting a man free, God makes him seek the company of holy men.' (p. 225)

8. Faith, power to assimilate, and knowledge of God increases: (a) 'There are certain signs by which you can know a true devotee of God. His mind becomes quiet as he listens to his teacher's instructions.... A real devotee develops the power of assimilating instructions.' (p. 244)

(b) 'One cannot even believe in the existence of God until one's heart becomes pure (p.220).... Not all, by any means, believe in God. They simply talk. The worldly minded have heard from someone that God exists and that everything happens by his will; but it is not their inner belief.' (p. 265)

(c) 'As a man's faith increases, so does his knowledge of God (p. 865).... As your

attachment to the world diminishes, your spiritual knowledge will increase.' (p. 502)

9. Slightest Suggestion takes the mind to God: 'If a man loves God, even the slightest thing kindles spiritual feeling in him.... But who can have this spiritual awakening? Only he who has renounced his attachment to worldly things... if it (matchstick) is dried, the slightest rubbing will set it aflame.' (p.658)

10. Restlessness, longing etc. for God increases: 'A fop, seated comfortably with one leg over the other, chewing betel-leaf and twirling his moustache--- a carefree dandy ---, cannot attain God (p. 225). ... The fact is that one does not feel the longing to know or see God as long as one wants to enjoy worldly objects (p.272).... What is more, one cannot meditate unless God wills it. One can meditate when God makes it possible for one to do so. (p. 280)

'You will feel restless for God when your heart becomes pure and your mind free from attachment to the things of the world. Then alone will your prayer reach God. (p. 375) ...When the time comes for setting a man free,... it is God who makes him restless for spiritual life. (p. 225)

'At the approach of dawn the eastern horizon becomes red. Then one knows it will soon be sunrise. Likewise, if you see a person restless for God, you can be pretty certain that he hasn't long to wait for His vision. ' (p. 674. also p. 83,338, 937)

11. Awareness of Time may go away: 'When I first had that experience, I could not perceive the coming and going of day or night. (p. 231)

There was a time when Sri Ramakrishna could not distinguish between the full moon and the new moon. He was told that this was the characteristic of a man of perfect knowledge. (p. 657)

12. God intoxication fills the consciousness: 'As Sri Ramakrishna heard the line "Contemplating day and night the Absolute Brahman," he said in a very low voice, "Ah!" then, by a sign, he said to the devotees, "This is the characteristic of the yogi." (p.968)

'He (Krishnakishore) too passed through a God-intoxicated state, when he would repeat only the word "Om" and shut himself up alone in his room. (p.118)

'Krishna-consciousness would be kindled in Radha's mind at the sight of a cloud, a blue dress, or a painting of Krishna. She would become restless and cry like a mad person Was Radha's madness the madness that comes from brooding over worldly objects and makes one unconscious? One attains that madness by meditating on God.' (p.220)

13. Love for God becomes motiveless: 'It will be good if you can practise unselfish love for God Prahlada had this unselfish love, this pure love for God without any worldly end. (p. 386)

'A real devotee does not pray to God for money or riches.' (p. 693)

Sri Ramakrishna also tells the story of three friends facing a tiger. The one who was a devotee advised others not to trouble God, and rather climb a tree. (p. 229)

14. Occurrence of spiritually significant dreams: Dreams, as people have known since ages and popularised by Freud, play an important role in bringing out the subconscious before the individual. Some sadhaka put a lot of emphasis on the importance of dreams.

'If you (to M.) ever see me instructing you, then know that it is Satchidananda himself that does so.' (p. 301)

Then there is the description of suggestive dream by a devotee when Sri Ramakrishna says, ' Oh, my hair is standing on end. Please be initiated by a guru as soon as possible.' (p.

123) He also talks of Baburam getting something in a dream. (p. 458).

'There is still another class of devotees, the *svapnasiddha*, who have had the vision of God in a dream.' (p. 483)

15. Appearance of godly glories and qualities in the personality: Nature of a man changes by imitating others or by thinking deeply about someone. 'You partake the nature of him on whom you meditate. By worshipping Siva you acquire the nature of Siva....' (p. 688)

'There are certain signs of God-realization. The man in whom longing for God manifests its glories is not far from attaining him. What are the glories of that longing? They are discrimination, dispassion, compassion for living beings, serving holy men, loving their company, chanting the name and glories of God, telling the truth, and the like. When you see those signs of longing in an aspirant, you can rightly say that for him the vision of God is not far to seek.

'The state of a servant's house will tell you unmistakably whether his master has decided to visit it....' (p. 203)

These are the traits, unattainable by ordinary folk, but coming naturally to a spiritual aspirant. Armed with this new personality which grows on the debris of the one with which he was born, an aspirant is now ready for much more intense internal experiences, visions and knowledge.

F. Stages of growth in Japa & meditation

Japa (repeating the name of God as spiritual practice) is a crucial mode of sadhana prescribed extensively by the teachers of devotional path of every religion. Japa results in absorption in God and finally in His realization.

Taking help from Sufi tradition to fill up the gap, we get the stages as:

1 a. Japa takes place at the tip of the tongue: In the early stage of practice, a devotee feels as if the holy repetition is taking place at the tip of the tongue.

b. Japa becomes internalised: When one grows to some extent in sadhana, he feels the same japa taking place at the heart.

c. Japa becomes spontaneous: The mind gets so deeply absorbed that one becomes completely oblivious of syllables and there is a spontaneous stream of japa. The image of God becomes one with the meditator. (Quoted from *Darshan Digdarshan* p. 104)

The Way of a Pilgrim describes, '... I grew so used to the Prayer (*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*) that I went on with it all the time. In the end I felt it going on of its own accord within my mind and in the depths of my heart, without any urging on my part. Not only when I was awake, but even during sleep just the same thing went on. Nothing broke into it and it never stopped even for a single moment, whatever I might be doing... If I am working at anything the Prayer goes on by itself in my heart, and the work gets on faster. If I am listening carefully to anything, or reading, the Prayer never stops, at one and the same time I am aware of both just as if I were made into two people, or as if there were two souls in my one body. (p. 42-3).'

2. Continuous remembrance of God has visible marks: "Ah, what a nice character Rakhai has developed. Look at his face and every now and then you will notice his lips

moving. Inwardly he repeats the name of God, and so his lips move.' (p.192)

3. Stages in meditation

- a. In the beginning, a devotee sees one or more part of the deity before his mental eyes.
- b. With concentration the complete image gets steadied once in a while
- c. In the third stage the image remains constantly present till disturbed by mental agitation
- d. Finally the image becomes a living presence. A devotee can see it smile, move etc.

4. Characteristics of deep meditation: 'In deep meditation a man is not at all conscious of the outer world. (p. 744)

'A person can achieve such single mindedness in meditation that he will see nothing, hear nothing. He will not be conscious even of touch. A snake may crawl over his body, but he will not know it. Neither of them will be aware of the other.

'In deep meditation the sense organs stop functioning; the mind does not look outward.

'At the beginning of meditation the objects of the senses appear before the aspirant. But when the meditation becomes deep, they no longer bother him. They are left outside. ' (p. 745 see also p. 604)

The Buddhists used the word "samadhi" as well as the Hindus; but "dhyana" is their special word for higher states of contemplation. There seem to be four stages recognized in dhyana. The first stage comes through concentration of the mind

upon one point. It excludes desire, but not discernment or judgment: it is still intellectual. In the second stage the intellectual functions drop off, and the satisfied sense of unity remains. In the third stage the satisfaction departs, and

indifference begins, along with memory a self-consciousness. In the fourth stage the indifference, memory, and self-consciousness are perfected. [Just what "memory" and "self-consciousness" mean in this connection is doubtful. They cannot be the faculties familiar to us in the lower life.] Higher stages still of

contemplation are mentioned--a region where there exists nothing, and where the mediator says: "There exists absolutely nothing," and stops. Then he reaches another region where he says: "There are neither ideas nor absence of ideas," and stops again. Then another region where, "having reached the end of both idea and

perception, he stops finally." This would seem to be, not yet Nirvana, but as close an approach to it as this life affords.[247]

G. Powers

Every aspirant experiences onrush of powers and obstacles during sadhana in multitude. Mythology and spiritual tales are soaked with description of these, so much so that Patanjali has devoted one whole chapter (out of four) on powers. This becomes more relevant when we find majority of the believers chasing and highlighting powers, also known as

siddhis. After all, people have always been power-seekers and power-worshippers.

The capability to make things happen that defy common laws of nature is known as yogic powers. Of these the most famous are the *ashtasiddhis* (the eight supernatural powers): Anima (power to become minute), mahima (vastness), laghima (lightness), garima (weightiness), prapti (possession), isita (supremacy), vasita (mastery/ dominion), prakamya (irresistible will). These powers are supposed to come to yogis during sadhana, though not much emphasis is given on these by scriptures of other religions.

Sri Ramakrishna strongly condemned power seeking, and hardly spoke about the nature of powers. Fortunately a few general remarks from him have trickled down to us that act as excellent pointers.

1. Truly spiritual do not want powers: Any kind of desire is weakness. Spiritual journey presupposes certain kind of strength which includes the power to reject powers. This strength is an important milestone in the journey within.

'People of small intellect seek occult powers --- powers to cure disease, win a lawsuit, walk on water, and such things. (p. 745)... Yes, people lay ailing children down on the ground where men chant the name of God, in order that they may be cured; or people cure disease through occult powers. All this is miracle-working. Only those whose spiritual experience is extremely shallow call on God for the healing of disease.' (p. 870)

2. Excellence and achievement indicate power of God: 'When you see a man doing great works, you may know that God's special power is manifested through him. (p. 320)

'... a man who is respected by so many surely possesses some divine power (p. 312)... He who meditates on God for many days has substance in him, has divine power in him. Further, he who sings well, plays well on a musical instrument, or has mastered any art, has in him real substance and the power of God.' (p. 561, 111).

The implication is that a spiritual person can master arts if he wishes so, conversely, master of such arts can grow spiritually quickly. After all, it is the same divine power working differently.

Ritualistic approach may bring powers: 'The path of karma (religious rites etc.) is very difficult. Through it one obtains some powers -- I mean occult powers.' (p. 611)

'After the first few months of practice(of Raja Yoga), you will begin to find you can read another's thoughts; they will come to you in picture form. Perhaps you will hear something happening at a long distance, when you concentrate your mind with a wish to hear... if you concentrate your thoughts on the tip of your nose, in a few days you will begin to smell most beautiful fragrance, which will be enough to show you that there are certain mental perceptions that can be made obvious without the contact of physical objects. (C.W. 1.140)

4. People come under the control of devotees: 'If a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control -- the king, wicked persons, and his wife. (p. 126)

'(About Hazra getting respect from others) That was the result of his japa and austerity.' (p. 766)

5. Uncommon power of mind is attained: 'By practise one acquires uncommon power of mind. Then one doesn't find it difficult to subdue the sense-organs.... (p. 179).

It may be noted that such uncommon power of mind helps an aspirant master any subject easily. There are other implications too.

6. Things happen as per one's thoughts: 'What I would think of would invariably come to pass.... At that time everything happened that way. I would repeat the name of God and believe that a certain thing would happen, and it would invariably come to pass.' (p.234)

Although this reads like a special power of Sri Ramakrishna, but this is actually a general trait.

7. Desires get fulfilled: 'God is the *kalpataru*, the wish-fulfilling tree. You will certainly get whatever you ask of him. But you must pray standing near the *kalpataru*. Only then will your prayer be fulfilled. But you must remember another thing. God knows our inner feeling. A man gets the fulfilment of the desire he cherishes while practising sadhana. As one thinks, so one receives.' (p. 481)

8. Worldly needs of an aspirant are taken care of: One is reminded of the famous shloka in *Gita* (9.22) *Yogakshemam Vahamayaham*; 'For them, who are engaged in constant meditation, I arrange for the acquisition of what they lack' Commenting on this, Madhusudan Saraswati writes, 'Although the Lord arranges for the *yoga kshema* of everyone without exception, still, in the case of others He arranges for it through the self-effort He arouses in them. But in the case of the men of Knowledge, He arranges without arousing self-effort for it. This is the distinction.' (Trans. Swami Gambhirananda, p. 595). Sri Ramakrishna expresses succinctly:

'God provides everything for a genuine devotee, even without his making any effort. The son of a real king gets his monthly allowance. I am not talking of lawyers and men of that sort, who go through suffering in order to earn money, and who become slaves of others to that end. I am speaking of a real prince. A true devotee has no desire. He does not care for money. Money comes to him of itself. (p. 336)

'But God doesn't take entire responsibility for a devotee unless the devotee is completely intoxicated with ecstatic love for him.... Not until a man thinks so much of God that he cannot look after himself does God take on his responsibilities. (p. 573).... Then God himself will think about your morrow if you yourself cannot do so. God Himself will think about your family if you are intoxicated with Him.' (p. 628)

Sri Ramakrishna gives two instances of this from his life when he wanted a fencing done around the tulsi grove, and when he wanted to help and feed devotees (p.332). The provisions were immediately supplied. Such things happen in the lives of every sadhaka.

And yet, we find Narendranath suffering from wants, raising a doubt. But Sri Ramakrishna clears the point, 'The son of an aristocrat does not worry about his food and drink. He gets his monthly allowance. Narendra, too, belongs to a high plane. Then why is he in such straitened circumstances? God certainly provides everything for the man who totally surrenders himself to Him.... But a man who feels intense renunciation within doesn't calculate that way (about getting provided sooner or later etc.) (p. 896).' He also talks about charity etc. done in the previous birth which results in affluence in this birth.

9. Name fame, success etc. come to devotees: 'Because of that power of meditation he (Keshab chandra Sen) achieved what he wanted --- name, fame, and so forth---, through the grace of God.' (p. 605)

10. **Devotees do not face humiliation:** 'This is the law of God, that He never humiliates a righteous person. Such a person is victorious everywhere.' (p. 571)

H. Obstacles

The journey within makes a person give up the world, attachments, desires, tendencies etc. Only after the external and internal control of organs a person moves forward, but after a while baser tendencies come in front of the aspirants in much more powerful but subtle form forcing them to surrender and remain stuck up. Every aspirant faces a different kind of obstacle at various stages. The general ones are noted below.

1. The early obstacles: (a) 'Living in the world and entangled in many of its duties, the aspirant, during the first stage of spiritual life, finds many obstacles in the path of concentration. (p. 139).... "Woman and gold" alone is the obstacle to yoga.' (p. 113)

(b) 'If the mind is much directed to something else, it doesn't dwell deeply on God (p. 295).... Such is the effect of brooding on worldly objects that it makes the yogi stray from the path of yoga.' (p. 350)

2. An aspirant may get stuck up: 'Many people think that their opinion alone is right and other's opinions are wrong; that they alone have won and others have lost. But a person who has gone forward may be detained by some slight obstacle, and someone who has been lagging behind may then steal a march on him. (p. 578)

'A man thinks, " I have practised a little prayer and austerities; so I have gained a victory over others". But victory and defeat lie with God.' (p. 183)

a. Development of vanity: With a little growth one may feel puffed up and may be swayed from the path with a desire to save the world or show-off.....

Temporary loss of faith: 'Sometimes it happens that, discriminating between the real and the unreal, a man loses his faith in the existence of God. But a devotee who sincerely yearns for God does not give up his meditation even though he is invaded by atheistic ideas. A man whose father and grandfather have been farmers continues his farming even though he doesn't get any crop in a year of drought.' (p. 238)

This distinguishes a common atheist from an aspirant with a temporary loss of faith.

4. Temptation by the evil: 'Once I was meditating under the bel-tree when "Sin" appeared before me and tempted me in various ways. He came to me in the form of an English soldier. He wanted to give me wealth, honour, sex pleasure, various occult powers, and such things....' (p. 746)

We find the parallel of this in the life of every prophet. Buddha's and Christ's temptations are quite famous which make this obstacle look universal.

5. Mental projection as obstacles

Milestones in Spiritual Life - 3

I. Visions and Experiences: General

Sri Ramakrishna's was a life of mystic visions and experiences to which every

aspirant can refer. Since our focus is on general milestones, we leave out an extremely rich collection, which otherwise makes a very absorbing reading experience.

1. Awakening of Kundalini and altered states of consciousness:

Awakening of Kundalini is like getting the royal high gates to the palace of spiritual existence opened. Only after it's awakening, can one hope to explore the world and find treasures of spirituality. This awakening cannot be achieved through theoretical learning or lukewarm approach to spiritual struggle. 'One's spiritual consciousness is not awakened by the mere reading of books. One should also pray to God. ----- To talk of knowledge from mere study and hearsay! What will that accomplish?' (p. 830)

The awakening brings forth a change in the state of consciousness, altering the way one perceives the world. These levels are termed '*bhumi*' (literally 'ground') in the Vedas and correspond to the '*Chakras*' of Tantra. Whatever the path for inner journey, one experiences these states of consciousness before realizing the oneness of all-pervading consciousness. Recent researches by neuroscientists have revealed that deep meditation is characterised by the flow of blood in the frontal part of the brain which invariably changes one's perception of the world. Sri Ramakrishna's words link up all these. 'Another characteristic of God-vision is that a great spiritual current rushes up along the spine and goes towards the brain. If then the devotee goes into samadhi, he sees God.' (p.316)

a. Description of different levels of Kundalini etc: 'After great effort and spiritual practise the Kundalini is awakened. According to the yogis there are three nerves in the spinal column: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. Along the Sushumna are six lotuses, or centres.... Yoga is not possible if the mind dwells on "Woman and Gold". The mind of a worldly man generally moves among the three lower centres: those at the navel, at the sexual organ, and at the organ of evacuation.... According to the Vedas these centres are called "*bhumi*", "planes". There are seven such planes. The centre at the heart corresponds to the fourth plane of the Vedas.' (p. 499).

The nature of these centres and lotuses are:

Heart Centre: *Anahata*: Twelve petals: awakening of divine consciousness and vision of light.

Throat Centre : *Visuddha*: Sixteen petals: longs to talk and hear only about God.

Eyebrow centre: *Ajna*: Two petals: sees the form of God, but a barrier remains.

Head centre: *Sahasra*: Thousand petals: mind goes into samadhi, loses all external consciousness.

(see pages 499, 245, 363 and other places)

b. Reality of these centres: There has been much debate on the physical existence of these chakras, leading many to scepticism. Two important points need to be noted in this context. The first is that every mystic talks of altered states of consciousness, and now verified by neurosurgeons. Secondly Sri Ramakrishna vividly describes, 'They (the lotuses) are formed of consciousness, like a tree made of wax --- the branches, twigs, fruits, and so forth all of wax,' (p. 362-3) and then describes his own experience of awakening of Kundalini in detail (see p. 830).

c. Movement of spiritual current: 'Just as a monkey climbs a tree, jumping from one branch to another, so also does the *mahavayu*, the Great Energy, rise in the body, jumping from one centre to another, and one gets into samadhi. One feels the rising of the Great Energy, as though it were the movement of a monkey.' (p. 949) The other ways of movement

are: like a darting fish, a bird hopping from one branch to another, slow creeping of an ant, wriggling of a snake. He concludes, 'Only he who experiences it knows what it is like.' (p. 237)

d. One example of change in perception: 'The Kundalini rising above the Visuddha Chakra (eyebrow/forehead centre) enables one to see everything as *akasa* (space)... One attains the Absolute by going beyond the universe and its created beings conjured up by Maya.' (p. 263)

2. Experience Of Kumbhaka: '...no matter what path you follow, yoga is impossible unless the mind becomes quiet. The mind of a yogi is under his control; he is not under the control of his mind. When the mind is quiet the prana (flow of vital force through breath) stops functioning. Then one gets Kumbhaka. (p. 248)

'A man may be united with God either through action or through inwardness of thought, but he can know everything through bhakti. Through bhakti one spontaneously experiences kumbhaka. The nerve currents and breathing calm down when the mind is concentrated. Again the mind is concentrated when the nerve currents and breathing calm down. Then the buddhi, the discriminating power, becomes steady. The man who achieves this state is not himself aware of it. (p. 579)

'Perfection in yoga is samadhi. A man achieves Kumbhaka without any yogic exercises if he but weeps for God. The next stage is samadhi.' (p. 344)

Actually Kumbhaka is a stage through which yogis practising Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga pass. But as is evident from the above words of Sri Ramakrishna, Kumbhaka is an essential milestone in sadhana, which comes to every aspirant irrespective of the path being followed.

3. Experience of divine light: No particular spiritual experience has drawn so much of importance and also fawning over than vision of divine light. Mystics all over the world have described their experiences of this vision with emotion and contentment, making it universally coveted by spiritual aspirants. To quote a poetic description from Madhusudan Saraswati, 'If the yogis, with their minds which have been brought under control through the practise of meditation, see some such transcendental light that is without qualities and action, let them see. But for filling our eyes with astonishment, let there be forever that indescribable Blue (Light) (meaning Lord Krishna) alone which runs about hither and thither on the sands of Kalindi (Yamuna)!' (Introduction to Chapter XIII of *Gita*).

Sri Ramakrishna sums up the gamut and gateway to Realization:

'When the mind ascends to the fourth plane (heart centre), the centre designated in Yoga as Anahata, it sees the individual soul as flame. Besides, it sees light. At this the aspirant cries. "Ah! What is this? Ah! What is this?" (p. 245)

'When the mind dwells there, one has the first glimpse of spiritual consciousness. One sees light all around. Such a man perceiving the divine light, becomes speechless with wonder....' (p. 151)

'The aspirant at first has a vision of the Goddess with ten arms; ... Then the aspirant has a vision of Gopala in which there is no trace of power. It is the form of a tender child. Beyond that there are other visions also. The aspirant then sees only light (p. 177).'

Sufis talk of *muqashafa* (yogic vision) in which light flashes away quickly as lightning, but slowly steadies and becomes permanent (quoted from *Darshan Digdarshan* by Rahul Samkriyayan, p. 104).

4. Experience Of cosmic sound: 'It (Anahata sound/Nada) is a spontaneous sound constantly going on by itself. It is the sound of the Pranava, Om. It originates in the supreme Brahman and is heard by yogis. People immersed in worldliness do not hear it. A yogi alone knows that this sound originates both from his navel and from the supreme Brahman.... (p. 416). The sound Om is Brahman. The rishis and sages practised austerity to realize that Sound-Brahman. (p. 404)

' But the Word (cosmic sound) is not enough (p. 188).... By passing beyond the Nada one goes into samadhi. By repeating "Om" one goes beyond the Nada and attains samadhi' (p. 263)

It may be mentioned that this sound is like the deep sound produced by a gong (p. 436), and has been variously described by scriptures of different religions.

5. Love body, love organs are acquired: Ecstasy, vision of God etc. are not experienced by the normal physical organs and body. New experiences demand an entirely new set of instruments.

'The fact is that one must have the "spiritual eye" (to experience God). You will develop that eye as soon as your mind becomes pure. (p. 418)

'God cannot be seen with these physical eyes. In the course of spiritual discipline one gets a "Love body" endowed with "love eyes" "love ears" and so on. One sees God with those "love eyes". One hears the voice of God with those "love ears" (p. 115, also p. 183, 217)

6. Ecstasy or divine inebriation: (a) '... by repeating God's name you become absorbed in him and finally realize him. (p. 879)

'When the Kundalini is awakened, one attains bhava, bhakti, prema and so on. (p. 611)

'First of all one acquires bhakti. Bhakti is single-minded devotion to God.... Through such devotion one's mind and soul merges in him.

'Then comes bhava, intense love. Through bhava a man becomes speechless. His nerve currents are stilled. Kumbhaka comes by itself.

'But prema, ecstatic love, is an extremely rare thing.... One forgets the world. One even forgets one's own body, which is so dear to a man.'(p. 315)

'Bhakti matured becomes bhava. Next is mahabhava, then prema, and last of all is attainment of God.' (p. 255)

'It is not given to everybody to feel prema, ecstatic love of God.... An ordinary man can at the most experience bhava.' (p.502)

(b) The play of ecstasy: 'You may feel a little ecstasy as the result of japa, but don't conclude from this that you have achieved everything in spiritual life. (p. 454)

'While chanting God's name, sometimes tears flow and at other times the eyes remain dry. (p. 645).... His (the devotee's) feeling does not flow in only one direction. He feels both the ebb-tide and the flood-tide of divine emotion. He laughs and weeps and dances and sings in the ecstasy of God. (p. 277)

'God is directly present in the man who has the pure heart of a child and who laughs and cries and dances and sings in divine ecstasy.' (p. 208, 698 etc.)

Technically speaking, milestone in spiritual life end here, though the journey continues on much more sure footings. In common parlance it can be compared to the journey

into space. The craft goes through various stages till it attains escape velocity essential for getting out of the gravitational pull of a planet, after which what remains is exploration and only exploration of the vast unlimited space. At the same time it can be compared to entering the subatomic world where the laws of classical mechanics collapse. About the stages of spiritual journey beyond a limit, Sri Ramakrishna says, 'What one experiences after that cannot be described in words (p. 604).' This makes the comprehension much more difficult for non-realized persons. Moreover, an aspirant does not remain a groper any more; he is now in the hands of God as will be seen later. Thus there is a total paradigm shift and Reality alters its hues. So, the categorisation noted below serves merely as fodder to curiosity, encouragement and inspiration for the budding saints.

J. Visions and Experiences: God-related

Visions and divine experiences come of their own by the will of the Divine. These are not attainable the way we achieve goals in our life, nor are they product of any effort. Spiritual practices purify the mind which then becomes fit to receive divine grace in different forms, including visions.

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'No one can put a limit to spiritual experience. If you refer to one experience, there is one beyond that, and still another, and so on (p.624).' This makes room for varieties of such experiences by followers of different paths and religions and also creates space for passing hallucination and imagination as valid religious experience by the mentally ill. To check for their correctness we must look for other characteristics as discussed. It may also be noted that the nature and character of a person changes permanently towards noble after a valid experience, as in the case of Saul who became Saint Paul when he had the vision of Lord Christ on way to Damascus. According to Sufi tradition such realization is called *muqashafa*. When an aspirant experiences this he finds that God, angels etc. about which he had only a belief are concrete reality. Now nothing can make him doubt the truth of these (See *Darshan Digdarshan*, p. 104).

'God reveals Himself in the form which His devotee loves most (p. 150)'. This explains why aspirants of different paths always see Reality differently. So, divine visions and experiences will always be personal but not exclusive. If an aspirant has been true to his practices, then his experiences are fully valid though they may appear weird to others. Not only that, all such experiences have the potential to be duplicated by others as we see from the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna 'I saw the visions described in the scriptures. Sometimes I saw the universe filled with sparks of fire. Sometimes I saw all quarters glittering with light, as if the world were a lake of mercury. Sometimes I saw the world as if made of liquid silver. Sometimes, again, I saw all the quarters illumined as if with the light of Roman candles. So you see my experiences tally with those described in the scriptures (p. 544).'

"Mohammed is said to have answered that sometimes he heard a knell as from a bell, and that this had the strongest effect on him; and when the angel went away, he had received the revelation. Sometimes again he held converse with the angel as with a man, so as easily to understand his words. The later authorities, however, . . . distinguish still other kinds. In the Itgan (103) the following are enumerated: 1, revelations with sound of bell, 2, by inspiration of the holy spirit in M.'s heart, 3, by Gabriel in human form, 4, by God immediately, either when awake (as in his journey to heaven) or in dream. . . . In Almahabib

alladuniya the kinds are thus given: 1, Dream, 2, Inspiration of Gabriel in the Prophet's heart, 3, Gabriel taking Dahya's form, 4, with the bell-sound, etc., 5, Gabriel in propria persona (only twice), 6, revelation in heaven, 7, God appearing in person, but veiled, 8, God revealing himself immediately without veil. Others add two other stages, namely: 1, Gabriel in the form of still another man, 2, God showing himself personally in dream." [328]

This makes religious experiences stand firmly as fully rational, for, scriptures are after all the spiritual records of the perfected souls of the past.

The chief characteristics of God-vision are, 'One sees light, feels joy, and experiences the upsurge of a great current in one's chest, like the bursting of a rocket (p. 161).'

1. Samadhi: Expln of samadhi : SV: 1. 159

Samadhi is that state of mind of spiritual practitioners in which all mental modifications cease to exist resulting in destruction of all kinds of duality, and the extinction of ego which is responsible for the awareness of the manifold character of existence. In that state 'God is experienced only as Consciousness, by man's inmost consciousness (p. 859).'

a. Slow extinction of awareness: On one of the occasions when Sri Ramakrishna was about to plunge into samadhi and lose consciousness of time and space, he described, 'I still see you. But I feel as if you had been sitting here forever. I don't recall when you came or where you are.' (p. 746)

b. Feeling of unlimitedness: 'Do you know how I feel then (in samadhi)? I feel like a fish released from a pot into the water of the Ganges. (p. 196)... You will feel as if the fish of the human soul were playing in the ocean of Satchidananda.' (p. 238)

c. Experience of samadhi inexpressible: 'In that state (samadhi) reasoning stops altogether, and man becomes mute. He has no power to describe the nature of Brahman.' (p. 103, 177 etc.)

d. Types of Samadhi: *Yoga Sutras* and other books have lengthy description of the types of samadhi, but Sri Ramakrishna talks of:

Nirvikalpa/ Jada/Stitha: Mind completely takes the form of Reality and continues for

a long time

Savikalpa: A little trace of ego remains

Unmana: A sudden withdrawal of mind from the world. Samadhi doesn't last long.

(see p. 639,702)

In addition to these Sri Ramakrishna categorises samadhi into five kinds in which one feels the sensation of the Spiritual Current to be like the movement of an ant, a fish, a monkey, a bird, or a serpent. (p. 829,350 etc.)

2. Appearance of God's glories decreases: 'The more you advance toward God, the less you will see of his glories and grandeur. The aspirant at first has a vision of the Goddess with ten arms; there is a great display of power in that image. The next vision is that of the Deity with two arms; there are no longer ten arms holding various weapons and missiles. Then the aspirant has a vision of Gopala, in which there is no trace of power. It is the form of a tender child. Beyond that there are other visions also. The aspirant then sees only Light. (p. 177, 150)

'Yes, it (vision of God) is just like the sun at dawn. You can easily look at that sun. It doesn't dazzle the eyes; rather it satisfies them. God becomes tender for the sake of his devotees....' (p. 282)

3. Sees God with form and without form: 'One can see both aspects of God --- God with form and without form. (p. 186)... One who worships God without form perhaps sees at first the deity with ten arms, then the deity with four arms, then the body Krishna with two arms. At last he sees the Indivisible Light and merges in It.' (p. 354)

4. Face to face with God : God-realization is not seeing a mere living presence, but dealing intimately with Him. Under special conditions He can be seen directly too, otherwise in trance (p. 176), and one's vision of the self gets obstructed to the extent that one has desire to enjoy worldly objects (p. 256).

When Vijay Krishna Goswami told Sri Ramakrishna, 'While meditating I saw images of gods painted on a canvas. How many gods! How many different things they said!...', Sri Ramakrishna confirmed his visions. As mentioned earlier, the particularised visions are not noted here, this one was meant as an example to state that God is experienced through all the senses, including speech, just that those organs are 'love' organs.

'If you practise a little, then someone will come forward to help you. (p. 331)... God explains all this to the devotee if the devotee only realises Him somehow. (p. 149)

'God can be seen. One can talk to Him as I am talking to you. (p. 109)

'God does reveal Himself to man and speak (p. 141).... (To younger Naren) A mere vision of God is by no means everything. You have to bring Him into your room. You have to talk to Him. (p. 802)... And what is vijnana? It is to know God in a special manner, to converse with Him and feel Him to be one's own relative.' (p. 911)

5. Experiences God everywhere: The ultimate test of spirituality is to experience God (call it by any name) everywhere and in everything. Whatever the path, the realization remains the same.

'As long as a man feels that God is "there", he is ignorant. But he attains knowledge when he feels that God is "here". (p. 425)

'One sees nothing but God everywhere when one loves Him with great intensity.... One who thinks of God, day and night, beholds Him everywhere. It is like a man's seeing flames on all sides after he has gazed fixedly at one flame for some time. (p. 115)

'In the beginning, when a man reasons following the Vedantic method of "Not this, not this", he realizes that Brahman is not the living beings, not the universe, not the twenty-four cosmic principles. All these things become like dreams to him. Then comes the affirmation of what has been denied, and he feels that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings. (p. 345)

'Attaining that love, the devotees see everything full of spirit and consciousness.' (p. 347)

What is worth noting is that Vedantic experience and devotional experience intermingle in the form of God and spirit. One beautiful example of this harmony can be seen in Sri Ramakrishna's experience. 'It was shown to me that each plant was a bouquet adorning the Universal Form of God. That was the end of my plucking flowers.'

6. Enjoys God in various ways: 'An ecstatic lover of God enjoys Him in different ways. Sometimes he says, "O God, You are the lotus and I am thee bee", and sometimes, "You are the Ocean of Satchidananda and I am the fish." Sometimes again, the lover of God says, "I am Your dancing-girl." He dances and sings before Him. He thinks of himself sometimes as

the friend of God and sometimes as His handmaid....' (p. 587)

K. Realisation and Knowledge of Reality

From the Himalayan heights of realisation flow rivers of philosophy which inundate the plains of common life in the form of perception, morality, art, literature, music, architecture etc. At times change in dimension of perception is brought about by thinkers and scientists, but even they find themselves unable to refute the prophets and their knowledge of Reality. What the prophets and saints realise in their inner consciousness, ultimately becomes the fodder for philosophers to corroborate or refute the conclusions derived from such knowledge.

Reality can never be perceived completely or thoroughly. A bird can keep flying for aeons across the space, but will fail to map it fully. Herein lie seeds for religious plurality and diversity in philosophy. Further, the realisation of a saint is of much more limited nature as compared to that of the prophets. For non-realized thinkers the nature of Reality will be strictly according to his own inner feelings and perception, and much more inferior to that of any saint. 'A man sees a thing in one way through reasoning and in altogether different way when God Himself shows it to him (p. 346).' Thus we can never have a single religion, or a unified philosophy of life.

Knowledge of Reality always comes in a flash and leaves no room for any doubt. They are not imagined, calculated, or reasoned out. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'I do see God directly. What shall I reason about? I clearly see that He Himself has become everything; that He Himself has become the universe and all living beings.' (p. 734)

1. All doubts regarding God disappear: 'Doubts vanish only after one has seen God face to face.' (p. 396)

2. The knowledge regarding God and the world becomes clear. (p.794)

3. Realizes that God with form and without form are same: 'The vijnani further sees that what is Brahman (the formless) is the Bhagavan, the Personal God. He who is beyond the three gunas is the Bhagavan, with his six supernatural powers.... If an aristocrat has neither house nor property, or if he has been forced to sell them, one doesn't call him an aristocrat any more.' (p. 104, 859, 248 and other places)

'(Satchidananda is like an endless expanse of water. The water of the great ocean in cold region freezes into blocks of ice.) Similarly, through the cooling influence of divine love, Satchidananda assumes forms for the sake of the bhaktas. The rishis had the vision of the super sensuous Spirit-form and talked with It. But devotees acquire a "love body", and with its help they see the Spirit-form of the Absolute.' (p. 217)

'That which has form, again, is without form. That which has attributes, again, has no attributes. Brahman is Sakti; Sakti is Brahman. They are not two (p. 271).'

The different aspects of God and their oneness is one of the major themes discussed in the *Gospel*.

4. Sees body and soul as different: 'He who has attained this Knowledge of Brahman is jivanmukta, ... He rightly understands that the Atman and the body are two separate things.... These two are separate, like the kernel and the shell of coconut when its

milk dries up.' (p. 719, 870, 319 etc.)

5. Loss of Individual ego in the Universal: 'Reaching the seventh plane (of consciousness), the mind is annihilated; man goes into samadhi. What he feels then cannot be described in words. (p. 170)

'... Then he knows nothing whatsoever of "I", "You" or the universe.' (p. 266)

The multiplicity in the universe is perceived only because of our individual ego. The ego gets dissolved in samadhi resulting in entirely new kind of perception, personality and action. (see p. 148, 150, 387, 405 etc)

6. Sense of 'I' ness and agentship drops: 'As long as a man has not realised God, he thinks he is free. It is God Himself who keeps this error in man.... (p. 211)

'(To a devotee) You are a judge. That is very good. But remember, everything happens through God's power. It is He who has given you your high position; that is how you became a judge. (p. 157)

"I" and "mine"--- that is ignorance. By discriminating you will realize that what you call "I" is really nothing but Atman.... Then you will realize that you have never been the doer of any action, that you have been free from virtue and faults alike.... (p. 208)

' When the heart becomes pure through the practise of spiritual discipline, then one rightly feels that God alone is the Doer. He alone has become mind, life, and intelligence. We are only His instruments.... (p. 311 also p. 201, 379, 900)

'The pure mind is the same as the Pure Atman.... When it becomes pure, one has another experience. One realizes: "God alone is the Doer, and I am His instrument...." One does not feel oneself to be absolutely necessary to others either in their misery or in their happiness.' (p. 350)

7. Sees God as the indwelling spirit (p. 266)

8. Realizes that God has become everything: This is the ultimate realisation. To quote a few statements:

' The farther you advance, the more you will realise that God alone has become everything. He alone does everything. He alone is the Guru and He alone is the Ishta. He alone gives us knowledge and devotion. (p. 843)

' It is God alone who has become everything. But in man He manifests Himself the most. (p.208)

'The bhakta sees that He who is God has also become maya. Again, He Himself has become the universe and all its living beings. (p.243)

' After attaining vijnana one can live in the world as well. Then one clearly realizes that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings, that He is not outside the world. (p. 418, 818)

'One who knows the Truth knows that it is He alone who has become father and mother, child and neighbour, man and animal, good and bad, holy and unholy, and so forth.' (p. 328)

9. Nothing exists except the One and everything is Consciousness itself: 'Sometimes I find that the universe is saturated with the Consciousness of God, as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season. (p. 260)

'God is not only inside us: He is both inside and outside. The Divine Mother showed me in the Kali temple that everything is Chinmaya (p. 521)...

'I saw houses, gardens, roads, men, cattle - all made of One substance ... I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner, and the victim for the sacrifice. (p. 942)...

'Nothing exists except the One. That One is the Supreme Brahman.' (p. 242)

'She (Mother) showed me that everything was full of Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessel was Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness--- all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss – the Bliss of Satchidananda. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him also I saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating.' (p. 345)

10. Sees men as mere masks on Consciousness: 'There is Loto (later Swami Adbhutananda). He bends his head, resting it on the palm of his hand. I see that it is God Himself who rests His head on His hand.' (p. 942)...

'When I see a man, I see that it is God Himself who walks on earth, as it were, rocking to and fro, like a pillow floating on the waves.' (p. 396)

11. Realization of 'I am He': 'This Primal power, Mahamaya, has covered Brahman. As soon as the covering is withdrawn, one realizes: "I am what I was before", "I am Thou; Thou art I".' (p. 290)

12. Pure mind and pure Atman are one: 'A man attains everything when he discovers his true self in himself. The object of sadhana is to realize that (p. 521, 582)... The Pure Mind and the Pure Atman are one and the same thing. Whatever comes up in the Pure Mind is voice of God.' (p. 844, etc.)

13. Even then ways of God remains unfathomable: Despite realisation of God/Truth, no one can know fully the ways of God. 'Can a man ever understand God's ways? I too think of God sometimes as good and sometimes as bad. He has kept us deluded by His great illusion (p. 257).'

This explains why religions differ in matters of theology. The ultimate Truth remains the same, but the phenomenon and norms of the relative existence are impossible to understand and explain. Whatever little understanding comes, comes through different branches of science. It is naive to expect a saint to explain non-spiritual matters.

What has been mentioned in this section gives only a glimpse of the nature of Reality as perceived by the Great souls. Various scriptures and related books detail them further.

14. Reality is beyond words: 'There is another state in which God reveals to His devotee that Brahman is beyond both knowledge and ignorance. It cannot be described in words. What exists, exists. (p. 366)

L. The Enlightened

Our experiences shape us into becoming ourselves. The lonely traveller on the inner journey to the Unknown, experiences the Reality in the form It may choose to reveal Itself. Generally the body does not remain alive after the attainment of samadhi (p.152), unless God wills so for the welfare of the world, or to work out his *prarabdha* karma (p. 477), or if a devotee desires to witness His *lila* (divine sport) after His vision (p. 153). In either case they become indifferent to pleasure and pain, birth and death, and have no desire of their own. To a common man he may appear to be the same, but he is no more what he was. In addition, he

himself now becomes an ideal, a mould in which others may cast themselves. The cycle continues.

The world today is a global village with faster modes of communication, media explosion, information superhighway and other such factors. Today it is extremely easy for any person to reach out to people of any walk of life. This applies to claimants of realisation too, who tend to get known overnight. How do we distinguish the genuinely realised from not-so-genuine? As in the case of struggling aspirants, the characteristics are mostly subjective and only a few are objective.

Realised persons, known variously as jivanmukta, paramhansa etc. have distinguishing features: 'The Master showed his devotees the manners and movements of a paramhansa: the gait of a child, face beaming with laughter, eyes swimming in joy, and body completely naked (P. 297).' In addition to these, the other chief characteristics are:

1. Becomes totally indifferent to the world: A paramhansa 'lives in the world like the cast-off leaf before a gale.' (p. 176)

'Paramhansa may not lay things up (for tomorrow),' implying that his sense of self-effort goes away completely.

'Don't trust a sadhu if he keeps bag and baggage with him and a bundle of clothes with many knots (i.e. hidden valuables)

2. Becomes silent: 'There is a sign of Perfect Knowledge. Man becomes silent when It is attained. (p.148)

'After having the vision of God man is overpowered with bliss. He becomes silent.' (p. 218)

3. Samadhi becomes habitual: While quoting a Vedantic monk, Sri Ramakrishna says, 'A man who had realised Brahman would go into samadhi at such a sound (melody of a flute).' (p. 297)

4. Different moods of the Realised: 'Great sages have childlike natures. Before God they are always like children. They have no pride. Their strength is the strength of God, the strength of their Father. They have nothing to call their own. (p. 862,176 etc.)

'A man who has seen God sometimes behaves like a madman: he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings. Sometimes he behaves like a child, a child five years old -- guileless, generous, without vanity, unattached to anything, not under the control of any of the gunas, always blissful. Sometimes he behaves like a ghoul: he doesn't differentiate between things pure things clean and things unclean. And sometimes he is like an inert thing, staring vacantly: he cannot do any work; he cannot strive for anything.' (p. 265 and other places)

5. Emotions become like burnt rope: 'When the dry branch of a coconut plant drops to the ground, it leaves only a mark on the trunk indicating that once there was a branch at that place. In like manner, he who has attained God keeps only an appearance of ego; there remains in him only a semblance of anger and lust (p. 171).... The anger and lust of a man who has realised God are only appearances. They are like a burnt string. It looks like a string, but a mere puff blows it away. (p. 178)

'It is no longer possible for the man who has seen God to beget children and perpetuate the creation.' (p. 405)

Similarly all other passions and emotions get dried up, leaving only an appearance. (see p. 252, 477, 513, 776 etc.)

6. Goes beyond virtue, vice, sin, holy: 'After attaining brahmajnana (knowledge of

the Supreme) one does not have to discriminate even about food. The rishis of olden times, endowed with the knowledge of Brahman and having experienced divine bliss, ate everything, even pork. (p. 388)

'They (holy and unholy) exist and do not exist. If God keeps the ego in a man, then He keeps in Him the sense of differentiation and also the sense of virtue and sin. But in a rare few He completely effaces the ego, and these go beyond virtue and sin, good and bad.... (p. 328)

'The paramhansa realizes that all these -- good and bad, virtue and vice, real and unreal are only the glories of God's maya. But these are very deep thoughts. One realising this cannot keep an organisation together or anything like that.' (p. 250)

'If you commit a sin, you must bear its fruit. But one who has attained perfection, realised God, cannot commit sin. An expert singer cannot sing a false note.' (p.369)

7. Becomes permanently peaceful and full of joy: Joy is the ultimate test of spirituality. Treasure of Jnana bhakti.

'Mere imagination and hallucination weaken the soul. Instead of nourishment and energy persons under the spell of these reap only lassitude, weakness and even disgust. But genuine spiritual realisation always brings spiritual riches, courage, strength, peace, joy and a sense of fulfilment.

'The nearer you come to the Ganges, the more you feel its coolness. You will feel completely soothed when you plunge into the river. (p. 178)

'There are signs by which you can know whether a man has truly seen God. One of these is joy; there is no hesitancy in him. He is like the ocean: the waves and sounds are on the surface: below are profound depths. (p. 678)

'One cannot describe in words the joy of play and communion with Satchidananda. He alone knows, who has realised it.' (p. 900)

8. Life in world may bring a little blemish: '... if a monk who has renounced the world attains divine wisdom, he appears as spotless as the white flower; but one who stays in the frying-pan of the world after attaining Knowledge may get a little blemish....' (p. 857)

9. Becomes World-teacher: One becomes silent, peaceful, full of inner joy after realising the true nature of Brahman (see p. 280 and other places). Being self-content, he wants nothing; knowing God to be the real doer of all actions he does not engage himself in any kind of work. In some exceptional cases God ordains some to do preaching work for the welfare of all.

a. Does not keep books: 'After the realisation of God, how far below lie the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Purana, the Tantra. (p. 544)

'...the characteristic of a man of Perfect Knowledge is that he doesn't keep a single book with him. He carries all his Knowledge on the tip of his tongue. (p. 341)

'If I see a man with even one book in his hand, I call him a rajarshi, though he is a jnani. But the brahmarshi has no outer sign whatsoever.' (p. 882)

b. Gets the command to teach: 'It is difficult to teach others. Only if a man gets a command from God, after realising Him, he is entitled to teach. (p. 126 etc.)

'A man can teach only if God reveals Himself to him and gives the command.... How forceful are the words of such a teacher. They can move mountains.' (p. 141-2)

c. God supplies knowledge to teach: 'After attaining God there is no lack of

knowledge. Then the Divine Mother supplies it without fail.' (p, 200, 890 etc)

d. People come to listen: 'When the lamp is lighted the moths come in swarms. They don't have to be invited. In the same way, the preacher who has a commission from God need not invite people to hear him.... He possesses such irresistible attraction that people come to him of their own accord. People of all classes, even kings and aristocrats, gather around him.'(p. 466)

e. Becomes exemplar: 'A perfect soul, even after attaining knowledge, practises devotion or observes religious ceremonies to set an example to others.'(p. 543)

10. Becomes supremely powerful: A realised soul outgrows human imperfections, and lives in the world to preach, teach, love and console the common man. Having reached the state of perfection, he becomes one with the source of strength, becomes a spiritual superman.

'He who has realised God looks on man as a mere worm.... How can one who is eternally perfect be afraid of the world? He knows how to play his game. An eternally perfect soul can even lead a worldly life if he desires. There are people who can fence with two swords at the same time; they are such expert fencers that, if stones are thrown at them, the stones hit the swords and come back.' (p. 689)

11. Welfare of all Every realised person has to be *sarva bhuta hite ratah*. This law must not be violated under any condition. When we talk of punishing people because they are possessed by devils, practising witchcraft etc, we are harming them and hence this law is violated. We find that Sri Ramakrishna's visions never violated this law.

12. Can transmit spirituality by mere wish

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